

Fighting the Right War

Numbers 24:17

November 28, 2021 First Sunday Advent

Main Point: Advent means ‘coming’ or ‘arrival.’ At Advent we celebrate Jesus’ promised coming as we wait expectantly for His return. He came to wage war on evil. This prophecy from early in the Old Testament reminds us that God’s promises cannot be denied. God accomplishes what He says and uses all things to work His sovereign plan to give life to all who will trust in Him.

SI: One verse only. But 3 chapters of background.

Advent, beginning of Advent season. Preparations – maybe you can relate – My family saves a little bit of money all year long. We keep a lot of room in our house for storing decorations 11 months of the year. My kids lovingly tolerate their Dad’s curmudgeonly tradition not to bring them out until after Thanksgiving. We make room for extra events – parties, time with friends and family and the lonely.

So this one verse from deep in the Old Testament is something of a quiet beginning to the season of preparation. And I hope you will get from this a renewal in the war that is Advent and that the Spirit would still and quiet your souls with His way of waging war. Read passage.

Intro: The Book of Numbers is given that name b/c of two instances of the Israelites taking a census of all the men who were of age and ability to go to war.

They have come out of Egypt – the Exodus – and now they are on their way to the Promised Land of Canaan. They reach the border, a place called Kadesh. There they send twelve spies, and ten of them come back with a report so discouraging that the people – 600,000 of them – say, “let’s return to Egypt!” God then threatens to wipe them all out, but after Moses intercedes for them, God commutes their sentence to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness until that rebellious generation dies.

After close to the 40 years, we get here: they are on the plains of Moab making preparations to cross the Jordan River.

Balak, the king of Moab, hires a hitman. (22:1-6) Balaam was a diviner, which is a fortune teller, a pagan prophet foretelling the future. Balak is like everyone – He’s looking for power to do what he thinks is best. He’s looking for power to help him wage war.

What does this tell us? That all humanity knows we are weak and that we need supernatural strength – this is Marvel, DC, Star Wars, Harry Potter- whatever is your favorite superhero or fairy tale. The longing for who and what Jesus is, is in the heart of every human, b/c Jesus is the reversal of the tragedy caused by Adam’s sin and subsequent death.

Jesus is the “Eucatastrophe” – J.R.R. Tolkien invented that word – Jesus is the Good Catastrophe, the good destruction. He is all the power, all the fulfillment, all the longings of all the desires of all the nations in one Eternal, Indestructible Person.

And you, like Balaam, like Balak, like me, need a renewal in that, an injection of the Truth of the Sweet Medicine of Warrior Jesus who is for us, so that you can be for Him, and fight the right war.

Uh, wow, Michael, that’s kind of a lot.

I know. And all we get is one verse? (Oh, that the Spirit would open our eyes wide to see what is in the Scriptures!)

Advent Means War

Victory is Assured

The War is Won, So Fight The Good Fight

1Advent Means War

This one verse is part of the pagan prophet Balaam’s third oracle. He is announcing the coming of a light as bright as a star, a king with supreme power. This would be partially fulfilled 300 years later through King David, but ultimately, he’s prophesying Christ.

From almost the very beginning of the Bible – there is a war footing – Gen 3 and on. Good versus evil. So to be biblical means to continually acknowledge that true Christianity is a fight. The temptation...

Advent today means war b/c the world presents an alternative vision of the good life and ramps it up during this season. This is the strong, relentless message that says: Your life is found in your possessions and experiences, in what you have acquired and achieved and earned. Advent wars against this: Advent says your life is found in God’s possessions and experiences, in what He has acquired and achieved. Is war too strong of a word?

The lulling to sleep that consumerism brings. Comfort, peace, meaning can be found in this life, this earth, this existence.

The beginning of the verse: The warfare of Advent starts with seeing Christ, beholding Him. To behold > here it means to foresee, to forecast the future. To apprehend, to look up with wonder, to gaze upon b/c there’s something about it that is wondrous, magnificent, mesmerizing, powerful. You look and it makes you want to keep looking. It draws you in.

What does Balaam see?

The Star – Light – The Star of Bethlehem. The Light of the World.

The Scepter – Symbol of rule and authority – a rod or staff the king held to indicate rule and authority. So Rev 19:15: When Jesus returns, He will be riding a white horse and He will rule the rebellious nations with an iron scepter. The scepter is meant to strike fear in the heart of Balak and all of God’s enemies. But for Christians, this is

comfort – despite all the insanity and evil in the world, God reigns and the scepter of the King of Kings cannot be defeated.

2Victory is Assured

What will this scepter do? “It shall crush the forehead of Moab” – echoes of Gen 3:15 when God spoke to the serpent in the Garden of Eden and said: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

This prophecy reveals a complete reversal of the expectations of the strong and powerful king of Moab. Balaam had been called up so that through his curse, the king of Moab, Balak, might defeat Israel. Instead, Balaam declares that the reverse will be the case: Moab will be destroyed by a coming king of Israel.

If only evil could be put right! If only the good guys would win! Isn't this the cry of all the oppressed, downtrodden, burdened, and broken of the world? Don't we all want to be on the winning side? Then join the Victorious One. Don't be like Balaam who was so blinded by money and self that he had to be rebuked by a donkey who talked. Balaam gets mentioned 3 times in NT as one who loved gain from wrongdoing (2 Pet 2:15-16)

Balak's shock and dismay at the prophecy... this isn't what I hired you for! And if you are going to instead bless these Israelites, just don't say anything at all! And Balaam says over and over, all I can say is what the Lord Yahweh tells me to say. The humor underneath – rebellion against God is utter foolishness. (Psalm 2) Even donkeys can see!

Illus of Num 21 The Bronze Serpent. Chrismon Tree in Monroeville. Bronze Serpent on a pole. Look at it, that's all. The look of faith. Victory is assured for those that look in faith. What does this mean? That you believe with all your heart that you can't do it. That if you continue on this path, it is sure and certain death. And you cry out, with even a mustard seed of faith – see, because it's not the amount of faith, it's who your faith is in – you cry out for Jesus.

3The War is Won, So Fight the Good Fight

The season of Advent highlights the tension we live in between Jesus' victory over death and His final victory when He returns again to make all things right.

What do we do while we wait? We fight the good fight.

What is the Good Fight?

Fighting the Lord's battles the Lord's way. 1 Tim 6:12-15 (see for more on this)
Fight for people. Fight against anxiety.

Fight for people - The old Advent hymns: why do we sing of joy to the world? B/c “He comes to make His blessings known as far as the curse is found.” God fights for people through the weapon of His people taking His blessings out to where the curse is found. (Angel Tree)

This one verse says this. Why a star? Why a scepter? B/c the world needs a ruler who can make all things right.

All humanity wants the same thing – life. Meaning in life. Making it through this broken world. The battle is for belief – both belief in evil and belief in good overcoming evil.

How does God conquer His enemies today? He makes them His friends. He doesn't argue. He doesn't shout. (When you're right 100% of the time, you don't need to.) He woos (old word). He invites. He welcomes.

Advent is for outreach > I think we assume too much, that people know what Christmas is about. Advent is a time of curiosity about what all these things mean and why... Opening the door to spiritual conversations... you can do this! You can fight the right battles this way... what does Christmas mean to you? What do you love most about Christmas? Have you heard how Jesus overcomes evil?

See how God fights for the wicked – he does not delight in the death of the wicked, but in repentance. He warns. He includes these in His Word so that men are without excuse, yes, but more than that, all these accounts of warfare in the OT - they provide warnings about the wrath to come. Jesus says, “Repent, or you too will perish.”

Fight anxiety Anxiety is fear of the future. This is one of the underlying themes of Numbers. There is war approaching and all sides are anxious about it. Many of the Israelites flee to all kinds of false gods when they want freedom from anxiety. That's what the episode in ch 21 of the poisonous snakes is all about. And then we see the Moabite King Balak went to extremes and spent a lot of treasure to alleviate his anxieties and it didn't work! The text is almost pleading with Balak and the Moabites – See the one true God and surrender to Him! He loves His people, He delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. He will love you, too.

The star and the scepter tell us something about the power of Christ in our weakness. What if you don't see Him? What if your doubts are strong? What if you don't behold Him? This is more common than we allow ourselves to believe that it is. Receive Advent. Go slow. Be patient with yourself and with God. The light of a star takes some time to shine. And it shines brightest in the darkest dark. Any real war against entrenched evil takes a long time to prepare for and to fight.

That's one of the primary principles of the evangelism I engage in... slow is best. People have been burned. And it takes a long time to warm up to trust, and a non-judgemental presence invites trust. The adage from Young Life – ‘people don't care how much you

know until they know how much you care.’ But then also do what Balaam did – open your mouth and speak. If God can give a pagan seer words, He can give you the words to say, too.

Why did I choose this passage? Light shining in a dark place. The faint light that cracks open the darkness. The far away light that invites, beckons, attracts, draws us to it in order to flee the darkness. The first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the gathering light of the weeks to come. Go slow and fight the right war.

So, when you sense anxiety rising – dashboard warning lights – alert, alert, alert! – Fight to tell yourself the truth of the star, the truth of the scepter. Jesus is your light. Jesus is your king. Cease striving and be still in His presence. It’s a fight that He has won and you win as you forsake everything else and abide in Him.

Conc: God Fights the Right War. Join Him in it.

How do we join Him in this war? By receiving power, light, victory. By being nourished again with power from Him. Beware the subtle but very strong but very false voice that says ‘you **have** to do this, you **better** perform.’ The voice that feeds the natural instinct to do whatever is before you in your own strength. Fight the good fight of faith in His power.

Communion: So, to attack that pesky evil in us, Jesus gives us His body and blood. Jesus says, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me, and I in him.” As we abide in Him, as we feed on Him by faith, as these elements are symbols then pointing to feeding on Christ for power and strength, then we wage war at Advent – the war of love, peace, awe, wonder, and assurance.

Community Group Questions
Numbers 24:17

What is your favorite tradition from Advent?

What is your favorite superhero or fairy tale or good triumphing over evil story?

What do you think of the idea of going slow through Advent?

How does the imagery of light from a star and power from a scepter help us to receive Advent?

How well does the idea of “Advent means war” connect with you?

How do you help yourself and help others (your family?) to look in faith to Jesus? (see Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:14-15)

Read 1 Timothy 6:12-15 about what it means to 'fight the good fight.' How can you fight the good fight during this season? How can you practically fight for people and fight against anxiety?